

# Working together for child and youth mental health: teachers, schools and families

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# But first.....let's plan to publish together

## On the cover:

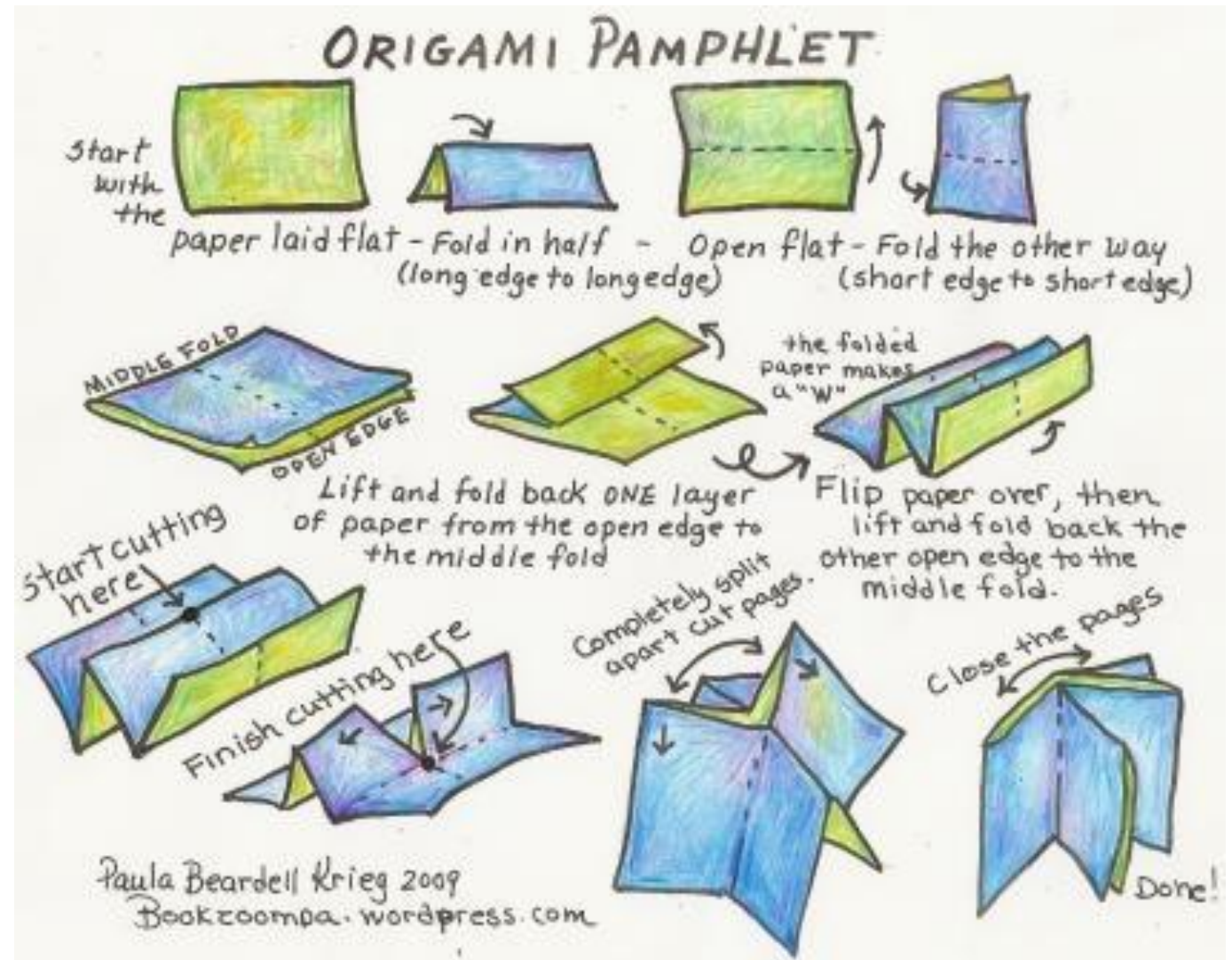
- *School Mental Health*
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## Page 1:

- What I want to learn

## Page 2:

- What I can share with others

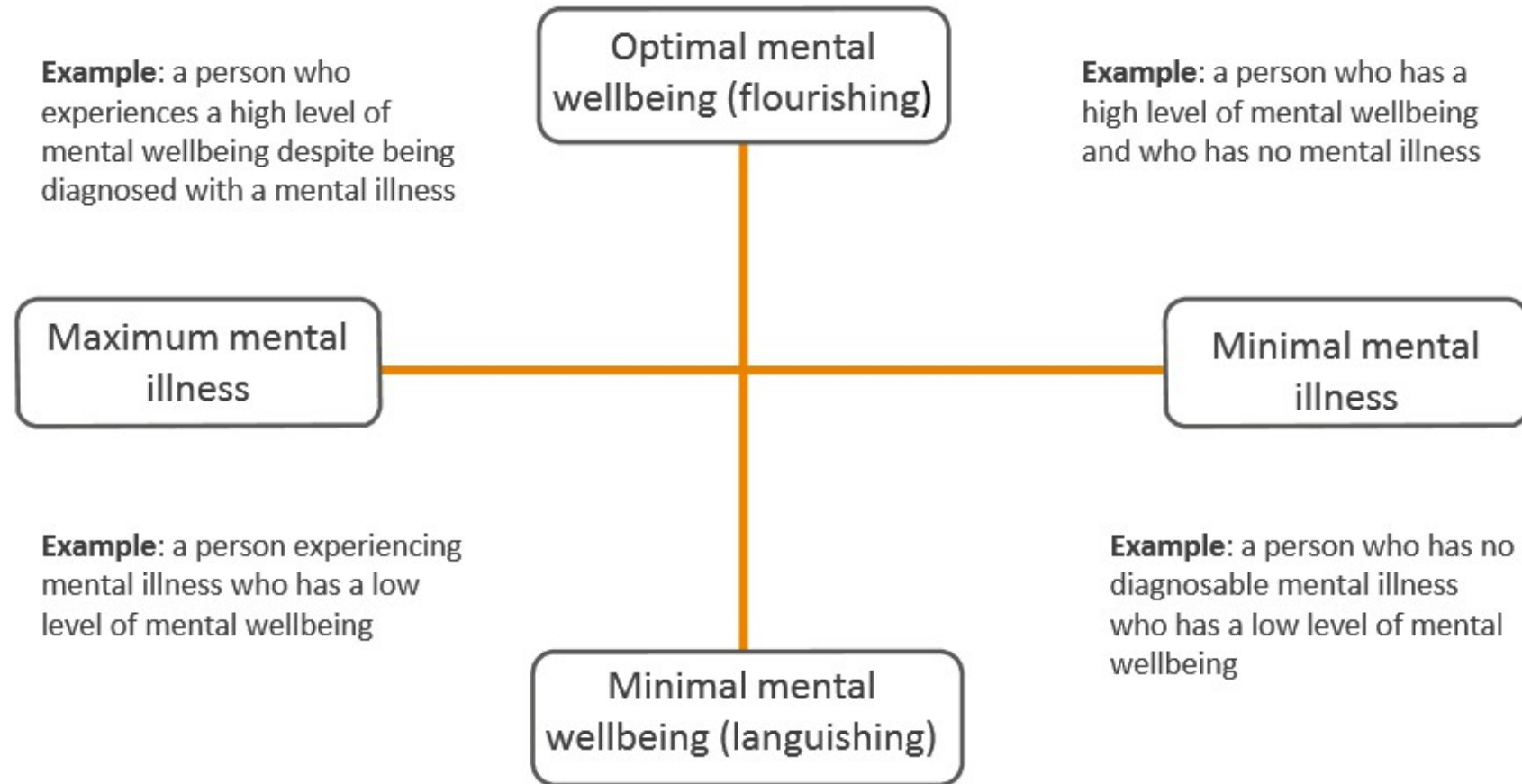


# Goals for this evening

Let's talk about:

- Child and youth mental health
- What we know, and what we need to know:
  - The experiences of parents, teachers, and youth
  - Effective partnerships
- Moving forward

# A model of mental health



(Keyes, 2003)

# Why are we talking about mental health?

## Because....

- **1 in 5** Canadians experience mental health disorders, and
- **1 in 6** get help through the health care system
- Among adults with mental health disorders:
  - 50% knew it before they were 14;
  - 75% knew it before they were 18
- Suicide is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death among youth 10-19
- Early identification and treatment can greatly reduce suffering, and greatly improve outcomes

# What stands in the way of getting help?

- Fears:
  - If we talk about it, will it make it worse?
  - (If we ignore it, will it go away?)
  - Is it my fault?
  - Will my child get better?
  - What will happen to them?
- Access to care: wait times can vary, up to 8-12 months
- Stigma

# STIGMA

- **53% of parents have told no one** that their child has a mental illness but among those who did, 56% confided in a teacher (Davidson & Manion, 1996)
- **46% of youth** identified stigma as a barrier at their school that prevents them from seeking support for mental health and/or addiction issues (CMHO 2013)
- If people are not advocating for themselves and their children, health and education officials don't know the extent of the problem

# Silence is not neutral

- **28.2%** of youth indicated that **mental health issues are not covered** in their school's curriculum and **35.9%** indicated that they were covered only once in one class.  
(CMHO 2013)
- Many teachers 'just don't get to the mental health curriculum' (Rodger, Leschied & Hibbert, 2013)
- Youth report:
  - some parents and teachers "Don't think mental illness is a real thing"



# Why focus on schools and mental health?

There is a significant relationship between mental health and:

- Achievement
- Attendance
- Staying in school
- Social relationships
- Most children and youth go to school
- Prevention and early intervention are the keys to success
- We all have a role to play

**WHEN WE WORK TOGETHER, WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

# What youth say about their teachers:

“I think that even with, like, physical health and as well as mental health, teachers, want to help generally, it's just they don't know how to. And when you don't know how to help someone, it just makes you feel uncomfortable because it's like, what if I say something wrong and then it just makes everything worse, right? Like, I think teachers generally want to help you; that's why they're teachers.”

# Mental Health Literacy

- Knowing how to get, and keep, mental health
  - Self-care, relationships, the whole person, social determinants of health
- Understanding what mental health problems look like at home, and in the classroom
- Knowing how and where to get help
- Decreasing stigma

# Levels of Literacy

**Mental health  
awareness**

Basic information

**Mental health  
literacy**

Deeper knowledge for those who have a role in supporting child and youth mental health

**Mental health  
expertise**

Professionals with skills and knowledge to provide effective, evidence-based promotion, prevention, and intervention

# Mental Health Literacy Education



- What do teachers need to know about child and youth mental health?
- What kind of courses do preservice teachers have access to, to help them understand mental health?
- Mental Health Literacy research
- [Mental Health Literacy course](#)

# Winning Attitudes for Teachers:

1. Kids do well if they can
2. All students have strengths
3. All students are able to learn when the proper supports are provided
4. Appreciate the challenges of family life, and refrain from judging and blaming.
5. Some things are outside of the control of parents

*~Dr. Karen Weston, Columbia College of Education, Missouri*

# What factors contribute to mental health?

- **Individual factors:** heredity, temperament, learning ability, social skills
- **Environmental:** school, community, social conditions, a sense of belonging
- **Family factors:** attachment, parenting style, relationships, violence, maltreatment, family structure and support

## FOSTER PARENTS

## MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY

How can we help foster parents meet the mental health needs of children?

How can we prevent the placement breakdowns that result from not feeling able to meet children's needs?



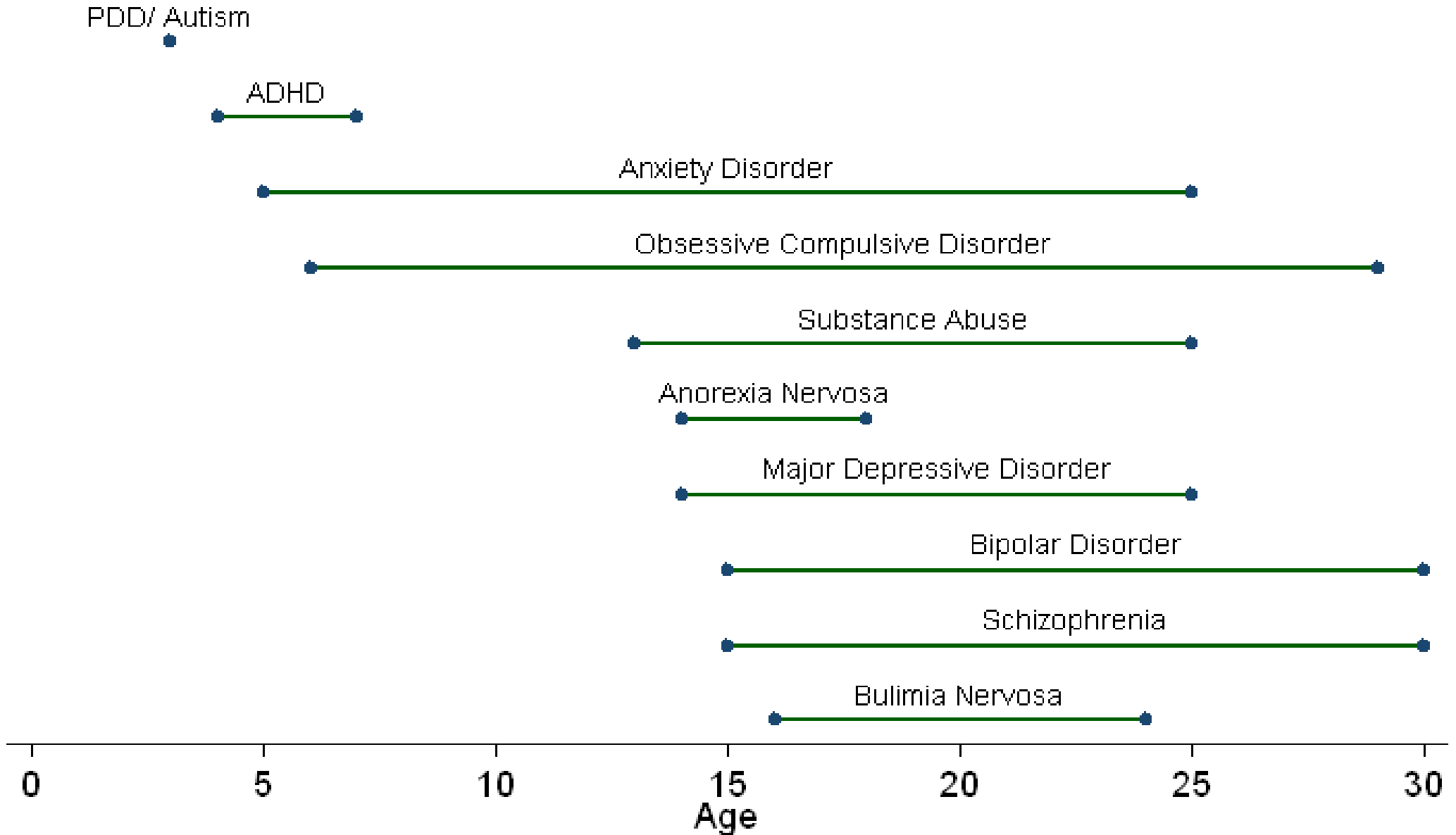
[Foster Parents Project](#)



# What does mental illness look like in a child or youth?

- Externalizing behaviours
- Internalizing behaviours
- School refusal
- Emotional dysregulation
- Tired or wired
- Loneliness
- Lack of motivation, concentration or enjoyment

# Age of Onset of Major Mental Disorders



Source: DSM-IV, 2000

## Youth telling their stories



- What kinds of support do young people need to make the decision to disclose?
- What can young people teach our preservice education students?
- [Joan's Story](#)

# Teachers' experiences

- There are many policies, rules, and expectations to juggle
- 40% leaving within 5 years, and the most frequent reason is stress (Clandinin et. al., 2012)
- Biggest stressors (Martin et. al., 2012)
  - Multiple roles, workload
  - Children's behaviour problems
  - Not meeting children's needs
  - Not enough time with their own families, not enough time for self (CTF, 2014)

# Teachers' experiences with children's mental health

- 93% don't feel their teacher education prepared them to deal with it (Andrews & McCabe, 2013)
- 85% name children's mental health as their biggest concern
- They want more training and support
- Even experienced teachers don't know how to talk to parents about children's mental health
- 62% don't feel that they get adequate recognition from parents (Martin et. al. , 2012)

# Teachers' experiences

- 93% feel they don't have a healthy work-life balance
- Teachers often report feelings of isolation
- 61% report stress-related illnesses

“The school teachers in Ontario face a public health crisis. Depression is the principal source of disability leave and the principal reason for prescription drug use among school teachers in Ontario .... The LTD claims processed by OTIP have doubled since 1993.” (Wilkerson, 2004)

## Opening Up

## Parents Speak to Teachers and Schools



- 82% of parents indicated they believe that teachers have an essential role to play in children's mental health;
- 38% of the parents felt the teachers were well prepared to do so.
- They report feeling judged and blamed by teachers for their child's behavior/mental health

[Opening Up video](#)

## COLLABORATION

## PARENT ENGAGEMENT



- What are the experiences of parents with children who have a mental illness, with teachers and schools?
- What would be helpful for teachers and schools to know?
- What are some ways to maximize the parent-teacher-school relationships for the best student outcomes?

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# What parents are saying:

“It seems constant and never ending. You’re always having to think about what conversation should I have? What conversation could I have? Should I relay this to the teacher? The principal? The school? What shouldn’t I? What is that conversation? It’s a never ending thought process which some days, I have to say, feels absolutely monumental. It just feels like the biggest mountain you have to climb. Because it’s constant. It’s just constant.”

# What parents are saying:

“Every September it’s the same thing right? You’re hoping that the teacher they get in September is going to be somebody who is going to value all of the information and the wisdom that you’re going to share with them about your child. But there’s always that, you know, that little piece of you that thinks, “Oh god, I hope they get it.” Because if they don’t get it one or two things could damage all of the great work that we have done up until now. It’s as though you are reinventing the wheel every September.”

# Questions to ask each other

- To the child: I noticed today that you are (sad, angry, anxious). What are things like for you today?
- To the parent:
  - I've noticed that Anna is having trouble concentrating at school. Are you seeing this at home as well?
  - What are the triggers for Denver's behaviour, and how can we work around those?
- To the teacher: Hisham is telling us that he finds some activities at school are just too stressful. Can we share things we do at home to create a sense of calm for him?

# Key Conditions for Partnerships

1. Don't judge
2. Do your homework
3. Be the child's advocate
4. Partner with one another
5. Like the child



# What do we do?

- Prepare ourselves: **develop mental health literacy** to understand what mental illness is, and how it affects children and youth
- Create **safe spaces** for learning, living and working
- **Notice** what is going on
- **Know how to get help**
- **Develop collaborative relationships**
- **Remember you are not alone:** you are part of a team, and other members have the expertise to help directly
- **Use the relationship** of trust and support to **model behaviours and attitudes** that eliminate stigma, and **show each person they matter**

What happens when  
we stand together?



[Stand Up for School  
Mental Health](#)



# Resources for Parents, Youth and Teachers

- [Teenmentalhealth.org](http://Teenmentalhealth.org)
- [Mindyourmind.ca](http://Mindyourmind.ca)
- Children's Mental Health Ontario: [kidsmentalhealth.ca](http://kidsmentalhealth.ca)
- Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health: [Excellenceforchildandyouth.ca](http://Excellenceforchildandyouth.ca)
- School Mental Health ASSIST: [Smh-assist.ca](http://Smh-assist.ca)
- Parents for Children's Mental Health : [Pcmh.ca](http://Pcmh.ca)

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